

**Changes to the Homestead Act Video Transcript**

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**Title:** The Homestead Act 1862-2012: Land Ownership

**Date:** April, 2011

**Featuring:** Robert King, BLM Archaeologist

ROBERT. It was a wonderful thing and the prediction was that it would perhaps be hundreds of years before the rest, the western part of the country, all this massive amount of land that had been purchased, it would be hundreds of years before people would settle out there, and yet within a hundred years much of the West was highly settled and ironically in some cases parts of the West were more heavily settled a hundred years ago than they are today.

ROBERT. It brought people to the land, it privatized the land. I think you can make some cases that homesteading was enormously successful and important for the development of certain areas. If you step back further and you look at a broader purpose for the Homestead Act, and that was to privatize the federal land, to create settlement at least in terms of Western culture at that time, homesteading, I think did achieve what it was supposed to achieve.

ROBERT. Interestingly, one of the greatest publicizers for homestead lands were the railroads, because the railroads had received grants starting the 1860's to build infrastructure, railroads to connect to the West Coast and it was another way that the nation saw that it was a necessary thing to develop and the railroads were paid off for their efforts by an enormous amount of land that was conveyed by the federal government. Well, the railroads had this land; they wanted to get some benefit for it; so they wanted to sell the land, so they started advertising the great value of western lands, sometimes a little hyperbole, sometimes their brochures and all would show the great waterfalls of Kansas and other things that were a little bit improbable to try to lure people out to the West to homestead.

ROBERT. There are so many different variations in this. Homestead legislation was not only gender blind it was also minority blind in a sense, there were Hispanics who homesteaded in the American Southwest, there were other minorities that did, African Americans came and homesteaded in the West.

ROBERT. Also women could file for homesteads on their own, and we're talking before women could vote. By looking at the indexes for homestead records you can get a sense of nationality, but in terms of direct statistics it's very hard. Even for women homesteaders it's a little easier, but there's a few instances of where you can't get a very good sense even from a name, most of the time you can, and it's estimated about ten to 12 percent of all homesteaders were women. And that's probably based on recognition of names, Sarahs and Hannahs and that sort of a thing.

ROBERT. You look at the history of voting rights for women, and that was a long drawn out affair, and yet here was legislation that allowed women an opportunity, when it was rather unconventional at that time and at that period of American culture for women to be that independent. And it was seen as a way in the early 1900's for women to obtain some property and some income and create their own independent lives perhaps it was to go back and gain further education to become a teacher or a professional at that time, so it was quite remarkable and different.

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